

Tiresias, Ovid, Gender and Trouble

Generic Conversions from *Ars* into *Tristia*

The brief story of Tiresias' punishment in the third book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (*Met.* 3.316-38) becomes a privileged site for mapping the different ways readers can re-interpret episodes of the poem in the light of the rest of Ovid's *corpus*. Tiresias, the first human *uates* of the poem, who is punished with blindness for voicing what he should have kept silent, can be included among those punished artists who double the poet in the *Metamorphoses*: while Tiresias is condemned for having voiced his knowledge of both sexes, Ovid is exiled for giving amatory advice to, and therefore knowing, both men and women. Thus the Tiresias episode reads as a pendant to that of Actaeon in the same book (the latter explicitly paralleled to Ovid's fate in *Tristia* 2.103-8), with the pair suggesting a veiled allegory of the *carmen* and *error* that caused Ovid's exile.

This is far from exhausting the interpretive possibilities of the passage as metapoetic and autobiographical, since recognition of Ovid in Tiresias invites further reflections on the interaction of gender and genre in the *Ars Amatoria* and the *Metamorphoses*. To elicit these different readings, the present paper is divided into three freestanding but interconnected sections. After a brief foreword on how the story of Tiresias was still used in 2013 as an authoritative myth to legitimate a recognisably chauvinistic view of sexual pleasure, the first section analyses the interplay of genders in the episode and elaborates further on Genevieve Liveley's intuition¹ that what Tiresias voices is essentially a male-authored verdict. It thus examines the connections between this verdict and the

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¹ Liveley (2003).

similarly chauvinistic views expressed by the *praeceptor* of the *Ars Amatoria*, whose treatment of women appears as peculiarly different from that which emerges in the *Metamorphoses*. This observation cues interplay of literary genres in the episode, with Tiresias providing a point of contact between elegy and epic, and signalling Ovid's different attitudes towards women and sexual pleasure in the two poems. This second section explores how Tiresias' metamorphosis into the blind *uates* of the myth of Narcissus accords with the trajectory of Ovid's literary career. Finally, the paper turns to a reading of the episode as a double for Ovid's exile in the light of the *Tristia*, and ends by suggesting that this conspirational reading bears directly on the character of Livia and her involvement in Ovid's punishment. Having started by reading mythological Juno anachronistically as an outraged feminist, we end by interpreting the episode as an allegory of the anger of outraged historical Livia at the frivolity and sexual liberty of the *Ars*. Which prompts deeper questions concerning generic interplay within Augustus' household: does Ovid's Tiresias episode moot the paradoxical possibility that a woman might wield imperial power?

1. A Foreword on Reception: Tiresias in *Blue is the Warmest Colour*

The tragic nature of the character of Tiresias as the blind prophet of Thebes has never been questioned. On the contrary, the earlier story of Tiresias the judge, the man summoned by Zeus and Hera in order to settle upon whether men or women experience more pleasure in sex, seems bound to be wrongly associated with trivial matters. In its latest rendition, in Abdellatif Kechiche's 2013 Palme d'Or film *Blue is the Warmest Colour* (orig. *La Vie d'Adèle*), the tale still features as an appropriate topic for banquet chitchat, but it delivers consistent ideological meaning. The episode that hosts Tiresias' quick cameo arrives almost at the centre of a film that will be especially remembered for its long and intense scenes of lesbian sex. After becoming more than acquainted with the variously depicted expressions of lust between the two protagonists, Adèle (Adèle Exarchopoulos) and Emma (Léa Seydoux), we finally manage to see the couple in a social

situation, when a party is given in Emma's house. It is here that Joachim (Stéphane Mercoyrol), one of the very few male guests at the party and an otherwise relatively marginal character, is granted the honour of spelling out the real subject of Kechiche's research, when he shares his thoughts on the mystery of women's sexual pleasure. From the height of his bisexual experience, Joachim defines women's orgasm as a sacred and 'mystical' event,² which has nothing to do with the prosaic banality of masculine coitus ('insofar as I'm a man, everything I glimpse is frustrated by the limits of male sexuality'), and we are invited to remember Emma's and Adèle's facial expressions as he goes on to argue with remarkable confidence that women definitely enter into a different universe while they are experiencing sexual pleasure. In this apparently frivolous modern symptotic vignette, Joachim exploits Tiresias as an example from an authoritative past to sustain a certain line of reasoning: as proved by the myth of the man who had experienced both sexes,³ even the Greeks knew perfectly well that women enjoy much more sexual pleasure than men.

Now, as the female audience of this speech seems to enjoy and partially agree with these apparently profound reflections, Joachim avoids mentioning the one section of the story that is neither applicable to his argument nor to the film's scenario, namely the story of Juno's anger in hearing Tiresias' verdict, and Tiresias' subsequent punishment. Clearly, this part of the story would

² The adjective closely recalls Lacan's parallel between the ecstasy of the mystics and women's inability to understand their own sexual pleasure, which he put forward in writing about Bernini's statue of an ecstatic Saint Teresa, see Lacan (1982), 47: 'it's clear that the essential testimony of the mystics is that of saying they experience it but know nothing about it.' On Irigaray's reply and on the possible connections between the contents of their debate and Ovid's Tiresias, see Liveley (2003).

³ Note that throughout the essay I will try to maintain the distinction between sex (the biological makeup of an individual's reproductive anatomy) and gender (the socially constructed sexual identity of an individual or else their own subjective perception of their sexual identity).

have profited no one in the film. Surprisingly, not one of these purportedly lesbian characters⁴ ventures to suggest that Joachim is either implying that he must be unbelievably skilled, or that he has just seen, with us, Adèle and Emma in Kechiche's film, so turning Tiresias' verdict into an indirect praise of the director himself. Albeit arguably a parody of the intellectual chitchat of the French bourgeoisie,⁵ Joachim's speech, at the very centre of the film, perfectly encapsulates the problematic and controversial messages of *Blue is the Warmest Colour*.

The ideological scandals of this speech, and indeed of the whole film, have not gone unnoticed.⁶ Kechiche may well be satirizing the French bourgeoisie more generally in the scene, but Joachim's speech is in any case made authoritative by its freight of self-referentiality and metacinematicity. When he claims that 'ever since women have been shown in paintings, their ecstasy is shown more than men's, whose is shown via women', he is in fact mediating Kechiche's unsolicited apology for his own use of the 'male gaze' throughout the film.⁷ In this speech, Joachim and the artist fuse into one character, at the expense of all the female characters on the screen, protagonists included. A

⁴ On the impression that lesbians are actually absent from the film, see the criticisms of Julie Maroh (2013), author of the graphic novel on which the film is based (*Le bleu est une couleur chaude*), and the reactions of Peter Bradshaw (2013) from *The Guardian* and Owen Gleiberman (2013) from *Entertainment Weekly*.

⁵ As Kechiche himself states in the interview included in Cannes' press kit (<http://www.festival-cannes.fr/assets/Image/Direct/049301.pdf>, viewed on 15/08/2014), the main interest of the film lies in the social differences between Adèle and Emma, which eventually cause their break-up. Yet the film does not apparently take sides with one class or the other: the portrait of Adèle's working-class family comes across as an uncompassionate caricature no less than that of Emma's high-brow party guests.

⁶ The film stirred more uproar and critique from feminist and lesbian circles than I could possibly rehearse here. Apart from Julie Maroh's blog, I recommend the articles by Manhola Dargis (2013) from *the New York Times* and Sophie Mayer (2013) from *Sight & Sound*.

⁷ A concept made famous by Mulvey (1975). Joachim alludes to the same works of art that the viewers saw on screen when Emma and Adèle had a tour of the Museum La Piscine in Roubaix.

similar fusion, I shall argue, is activated between the Tiresias of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Ovid as the *praeceptor amoris* of the *Ars Amatoria* in terms of their approach to women's sexual pleasure. One of the troubles with Joachim's speech, as indeed with Tiresias' judgement, is that in a film which has lesbian love, or at least female sexuality, as its main focus, the superiority of female orgasm must be expressed not just visually by the male director, but verbally by one of the very few male characters in a clear intellectual liaison with the director. Kechiche and Joachim, like their counterpart Tiresias long before them, not only prove that heterosexual sex is still centre-stage, but more importantly hide an indirect compliment to masculine skills behind the pretence of giving voice – finally – to unbridled female sexuality, since the corollary of Tiresias' argument reads that men are better at providing the pleasure that women are more likely to enjoy.⁸

⁸ As Sophie Mayer (2013) points out, the film, 'premiered at Cannes close to the signing of the same-sex marriage bill in France, [only] *appears* to confirm a post-homophobic culture' (my emphasis). On the surface, Kechiche does seem to give voice to female sexuality and homosexuality, but on closer inspection one finds out that this only happens according to the discourse and norms of the dominant gender: Kechiche's female homosexuality, inscribed in just another 'phallogentric history', becomes just another instance of Irigaray's 'Female Hom(m)osexuality', whose claims are 'not enough to raise doubts about the privilege of the phallus': see Irigaray (1985), 98-103. Joachim's speech is a clear example of this, as is Kechiche's visual use of the 'male gaze', but it also needs emphasising, with Mayer, that in the film 'every verbal and visual reference is to the work of male artists': in particular, Kechiche adopts Pierre de Marivaux's *La vie de Marianne* as the signature tune for the story. According to Mayer, Marivaux's 'male inscription of a female first-person point of view appears to license Kechiche's own'. Similarly, as regards Ovid's Tiresias, Liveley (2003), 153-4, notes that the females, Juno and Venus, are silenced throughout the episode, whereas the authority to speak is conferred on the male characters, Jupiter and "man-made-woman-made-man" Tiresias'. In a line of reasoning slightly different from mine, Liveley (2003), 156-7, finds a possible cause of Juno's anger in this repression of the female voice activated by Jupiter through the choice of letting Tiresias speak, since he is, after all, a 'man-made-woman, a figure who is... first and foremost a man'. Similarly, Fabre-Serris (2011), 117-118, emphasises the male perspective of the whole of

2. Gender Conversions: Tiresias/Ovid as *Praeceptor Amoris*

Different interpretations have been proposed to solve what has been considered the mystery of this version of Tiresias' myth,⁹ namely the cause of Juno's anger. As regards the Greek sources, the most likely explanation is the rivalry between Hera and Aphrodite as the goddesses of matrimonial and sexual love respectively. Tiresias' reminder of women's enjoyment of sexual pleasure would constitute a recognition of Aphrodite's power and consequently an outrage for the goddess of marriage and monogamy.¹⁰ When applied to the *Metamorphoses*, this interpretation also turns

Metamorphoses 3, and identifies Tiresias' fault in having taken part, as a man, in the mysteries of women's sexual pleasure.

⁹ Ovid's version dates back to the lost *Melampody* attributed to Hesiod, as attested by Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.7, *Schol. Hom. Od.* 10.494 (ii. 475 Dindorf), *Schol. Lycophr.* 683 (ii. 226 Scheer) and Phleg. *Mirab.* 4. (pp. 73-4 Keller), see Hesiod, F 275 in Merkelbach – West (1967), 134-6. For other variants of this version see Brisson (1976), 11-77 and Ugolini (1995), 33-65. A different version of the myth, where Tiresias is blinded by Athena after having accidentally seen her naked, famously narrated by Callimachus (*Hymn.* 5.75-130), is attested in Pherekydes (Ps.-Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.6.7 = Pherekydes *FGrHist* 3 F 92a), Propertius 4.9.57-8 and Nonnus *Dion.* 5.337-45: see Brisson (1976), 21-77 and Ugolini (1995), 66-78. A mysterious third version, where Tiresias undergoes six sex-changes and is finally transformed into a mouse, was transmitted by Eustathius in his commentary to *Odyssey* 10 and is said to derive from an elegiac poem by Sostratus (Eust. *ad Od.* 10.494, 1665.48ff. Stallbaum). On this version, see Brisson (1976), 84-111 and (1995), 103-27, Ugolini (1995), 100-10, O'Hara (1996) and Ceccarelli (2010).

¹⁰ See Brisson (1976), 33-4, Loraux (1989), 17, Ugolini (1995), 60. Another interpretation is that Tiresias is punished for revealing and violating the secrets of women: see Loraux (1989), 253-71, Ugolini (1995), 60, Fabre-Serris (2011), 107. On the basis of the connections between Tiresias' myth and an episode of the Indian *Mahâbhârata*, where a man who was transformed into a woman by bathing in a river tells the Indian god Indra (correspondent of Zeus) that he prefers to remain a woman because women enjoy greater pleasure

Tiresias' verdict into an indirect approval of Jupiter's extramarital affairs, whose cause was after all always Venus *qua* sexual libido, and Tiresias' judgement must then sound to Juno's ears like an unwelcome confirmation of the pleasure experienced by other women in sexual intercourse with her husband.¹¹ In the episode immediately preceding that of Tiresias (*Met.* 3.253-315), Juno had just punished Semele with a kind of '*contrapasso* through analogy'¹² based on Semele's desire to experience sexual pleasure with Jupiter at its highest possible power: thanks to Juno's advice, the Theban woman gets what she deserves and asked for, an orgasm at full blast, elicited by the joint power of Juno and her rival Venus.¹³ And yet, Juno may also be read as a feminist *ante litteram* in a recognisably chauvinistic world which, according to Kechiche's film, would seem to have remained quite unchanged in more than 2000 years. The reason for Juno's anger is in my view grounded in the misogynistic nature of Tiresias' statement, which also reflects Ovid's own take on women's

in love than men, Krappe (1928) speculated that in an older version of the myth Hera punished Tiresias by changing her into a man again. There seems to be no ground for such speculation (see Ugolini [1995], 58-9), but the Sostratus version (see n. 9) does attest a change of sex as Hera's punishment, although from man to woman, rather than from woman to man.

¹¹ For a similar line of reasoning, see Anderson (1997), 369, who adds that 'Juno had every right to disagree in view of the rarity of her *uoluptas*'. At 371, Anderson concludes that Tiresias is blinded 'as a sign that he woefully lacks basic knowledge about men, women, and sex'. See *contra* Barchiesi in Barchiesi – Rosati (2007), 172, arguing that blinding is the punishment reserved for those who have witnessed something 'real'.

¹² *Contrapasso* is the term used by Dante for the kinds of punishment in the *Inferno*, where the punishments are always in a relation of contrast or analogy with the sin itself.

¹³ Cf. Semele's request, *qualem Saturnia... te solet amplecti, Veneris cum foedus initis, / da mihi te talem* ('in the same guise as *Saturnia* is used to your embrace, when you enter the pact of *Venus*, give yourself to me', *Met.* 3.293-5) and what sounds like an ironic comment from Juno on Semele's 'marriage in death', *donis... iugalibus arsit* ('she was burnt by those wedding gifts', *Met.* 3.309). Also note Ovid's allusion to the ancient etymology *Iuno*<*iungo*, with Prauscello (2008), 569.

sexual pleasure in the *Ars Amatoria* and thus ties poet to prophet in an inextricable bond. I propose that Ovid's Tiresias (who is first of all not as bisexual as he appears at first glance), far from embodying with his blindness a sort of Prometheus-figure for women, harshly punished for attempting to reveal and establish the authenticity of female sexual pleasure in and against a society that strives to relegate women to a mere role of passivity,¹⁴ ends up reinforcing, almost paradoxically, the reality of Irigaray's 'phallogentric dialectic' by confirming the supremacy of the male point of view in assuming control over female sexual pleasure and desire.

At *Met.* 3.316-38, after the description of the twofold birth of Bacchus (*bis geniti... Bacchi*, 'Bacchus... born twice', *Met.* 3.317), Ovid narrates the story of another Theban character who was similarly 'born twice',¹⁵ if not three times:¹⁶

dumque ea per terras fatali lege geruntur
tutaque bis geniti sunt incunabula Bacchi,
forte Iouem memorant diffusum nectare curas
seposuisse graues uacuaque agitassemis
cum Iunone iocos et 'maior uestra profecto est
quam quae contigit maribus' dixisse 'uoluptas.'
illa negat. placuit quae sit sententia docti
quaerere Tiresiae; Venus huic erat utraque nota.

¹⁴ A slightly exaggerated version of Loraux's interpretation of the Greek Tiresias: Loraux (1989), 17-8; see also Ugolini (1995), 60. On the nonexistence of women's libido in the 'phallogentric dialectic', see Irigaray (1985), esp. 83: 'neither her libido nor her sex/organs have any right to any "truth" except the truth that casts her as "less than", other side, backside, of the representation thereby perpetuated.'

¹⁵ Cf. the first words of a kind of reincarnation of Tiresias, Calliope Stephanides, the hermaphrodite protagonist of Jeffrey Eugenides' 2002 novel *Middlesex* (2003 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction): '*I was born twice: first, as a baby girl, on a remarkably smogless Detroit day in January 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy, in an emergency room near Petoskey, Michigan, in August of 1974 ... Like Tiresias, I was first one thing and then the other...*' (my emphasis).

¹⁶ The text is from Tarrant (2004) unless specified.

nam duo magnorum uiridi coeuntia silua
 corpora serpentum baculi uiolauerat ictu
 deque uiro factus (mirabile!) femina septem
 egerat autumnos; octauo rursus eosdem
 uidit et 'est uestrae si tanta potentia plagae'
 dixit 'ut auctoris sortem in contraria mutet,
 nunc quoque uos feriam.' percussis anguibus isdem
 forma prior rediit genetiuoque uenit imago.
 arbiter hic igitur sumptus de lite iocosa
 dicta Iouis firmat; grauius Saturnia iusto
 nec pro materia fertur doluisse suique
 iudicis aeterna damnauit lumina nocte.
 at pater omnipotens (neque enim licet inrita cuiquam
 facta dei fecisse deo) pro lumine adempto
 scire futura dedit poenamque leuauit honore.

(Met. 3.316-38)

Now while these things were happening on the earth by the decrees of fate, when the cradle of Bacchus, twice born, was safe, it chanced that Jove (as the story goes), relaxed by wine, put his weighty cares aside and bandied good-humoured jests with Juno, who shared his leisure. 'I maintain', said he, 'that your pleasure in love is clearly greater than that which men enjoy.' She denied that this was true. And so they decided to ask the judgement of wise Tiresias: he knew both sides of love. For once, with a blow of his staff he had injured two huge serpents mating in the green forest; and, wonderful to relate, from man he was changed into a woman, and in that form spent seven years. In the eighth year he saw the same serpents again and said: 'Since in striking you there is such magic power as to change the nature of the giver of the blow, now I will strike you once again.' So saying, he struck the serpents and his former state was restored and he became as he had been born. He therefore, being appointed to arbitrate the playful dispute of the gods, confirmed Jupiter's sentence. Saturnia, they say, grieved more deeply than she had right to, and more than the issue warranted, and condemned the eyes of her arbitrator to perpetual blindness. But the omnipotent father (for no god may undo what another god has done) in return for his loss of sight gave Tiresias the power to know the future, lightening the penalty by this honour.

(tr. Miller – Goold with minor changes)

This version of the story has allowed many to speak of Tiresias' bisexuality,¹⁷ but whether one takes bisexuality, in relation to antiquity, as indicating an individual's possession of both sexes/genders or, in the modern sense of the word, as referring to their sexual attraction towards both males and females, neither of these definitions is an entirely accurate label for Ovid's Theban seer. To start with the modern definition, it is necessary to emphasise that although Tiresias has experienced, as an individual, sexual intercourse with both sexes, he 'does not love male and female

¹⁷ See for example Carp (1983), *passim*, Anderson (1997), 370, Michalopoulos (2012), 228 and *passim*. Rimell (2006), 30, more appropriately speaks of gender-bending.

with one body, but loves both sequentially – and heterosexually – with a sequentially sexed body’.¹⁸ In other words, since sex change for Tiresias is the *condicio sine qua non* for experiencing bisexuality, he risks becoming a symbol of the all-encompassing hierarchical predominance of heterosexual sex and a mythical detractor of bisexuality at the same time.¹⁹ On the other hand, if we consider bisexuality in the ancient sense, Brisson felt the need to point out that there exists a fundamental difference between what he calls ‘simultaneous bisexuality’ (*bisexualité simultanée*) and ‘successive bisexuality’ (*bisexualité successive*): the former characterises primordial beings, like the Androgynoi and the Phoenix, who possess two sexes simultaneously, and can be considered to work as ‘archetypes’, the separation of whose constituent opposites will give rise to the Greek binary system of reality; the latter category, in which Tiresias falls, includes beings whose experience of both opposites has rendered mediators (*médiateurs*) between various poles of reality’s dualism such as, in Tiresias’ case, male/female, divine/human, future/past, Jupiter/Juno, active/passive and so on.²⁰ There is, in fact, a huge difference between Tiresias and properly bisexual figures like Hermaphroditus, or Lucretius’ androgyne, whose possession of both sexes becomes equal to the possession of no sex at all, as in Brisson’s archetypes:²¹ *androgynum, interutrasque nec utrum, utrimque remotum* (‘the androgyne, between the two sexes, yet not either, remote from both’, Lucr. 5.839); *nec duo sunt sed forma duplex, nec femina dici / nec puer ut possit, neutrumque*²² *et utrumque uidentur* (‘they are not two, but a double form, so that it can neither be called woman nor man: it seems to be neither and both’, Ov. *Met.* 4.378-9). Ovid’s

¹⁸ Madden (2008), 45.

¹⁹ Alternatively, Garber (1995), 153-68 and (1999) attempts a reading of Tiresias’ sex change as an allegory of bisexuality.

²⁰ See Brisson (1997), 9-12, and 103-27 on Tiresias as *médiateur*, on which see also García Gual (1975) and Carp (1983).

²¹ See Brisson (1997), 10: ‘Posséder les deux sexes, c’est n’en posséder aucun’.

²² *u. l. nec utrumque Ω.*

Tiresias is not a truly bisexual character: indeed, one may interpret his sex change as the punishment for tearing apart with his staff precisely that archetypal androgynous figure created by the mating of the two serpents.²³ Tiresias' encounter with the serpents implies not only, as Brisson and others have noticed, his always already active connection to prophecy,²⁴ but more significantly casts him as a sort of demiurgic figure, a contributor to the development of Greek dualism from (Shamanic²⁵) nondualism, to which bisexuality belongs. Thus, he gets to experience what he took part in creating: the clear-cut distinction between two distinguished and opposite sexes – precisely the opposite of bisexuality.²⁶

Yet Ovid's text seems to sustain this line of reasoning up to a point. Not only does it let Tiresias spell out the actual dichotomy of the sexes (note the emphasis on *in contraria*, 329²⁷), but it also never lingers on a transsexual – or even transgender – portrait of the seer. Instead, Ovid describes his peculiarity as pertaining to the realm of experience rather than to his constituent features: if Hermaphroditus' characteristic is based on something that 'seems' or could be seen (*uidentur*, *Met.*

²³ Cf. Aristotle's description of the mating of two serpents, and how it seems to recall the myth of the Androgynoi: οὕτω δὲ σφόδρα οἱ γ' ὄφεις περιελίττονται ἀλλήλοις, ὥστε δοκεῖν ἑνὸς ὄφεως δικεφάλου εἶναι τὸ σῶμα ἅπαν ('they coil round one another so tightly that the whole thing looks like one serpent with two heads', Arist. *HA* 5.4, 540 b 1-3), see Brisson (1976), 55.

²⁴ On the connections between snakes and prophecy in relation to Tiresias, see Brisson (1976), 46-77, Ugolini (1995), 57-8. It is telling that, according to Ps.Apollodorus *Bibl.* 3.6.7, Tiresias is the grand-son of Udeus, one of the spartoi, and therefore offspring of a serpent.

²⁵ On the possible Shamanic origin of Tiresias' bisexuality, see García Gual (1975), 119-20, Ugolini (1995), 62-3.

²⁶ Barchiesi seems to imply this when he comments that Tiresias 'attraversa... la *differenza sessuale* e le sue asimmetrie' (Barchiesi – Rosati (2007), 174, my emphasis), although the asymmetric relation between the sexes will only surface in Tiresias' verdict.

²⁷ Liveley (2003), 150, takes this to imply Ovid's notion of the female sex as 'other' much in the same sense as Irigaray's *Speculum* (1985).

4.379), Tiresias' strength lies in his knowledge, since he 'knew both Venuses' (*Venus huic erat utraque nota*, 323). The expression *utraque Venus* is nevertheless ambiguous,²⁸ pushing Tiresias closer to either bisexuality or homosexuality. In Tiresias' case, it clearly refers to his sexual experience both as a man and as a woman, and as such it implies a clear distinction between men's and women's sexual pleasure. But there is no reason why the expression could not also mean 'sexual pleasure with men and women',²⁹ with the implication that even a male character who has had bisexual experiences could have given the same answer. Moreover, the *iunctura* only appears again twice, in both cases originally in Greek, to indicate the experience of both active and passive roles in sexual intercourses, either heterosexual or homosexual (both male and female).³⁰ In all three cases, it is clear that the dichotomy at stake here is not male/female, but rather active/passive, and Tiresias therefore confirms the ancient view that those who take a passive role indulge more in pleasure, and can thus be considered weaker, more 'feminine' or 'effeminate', as it were, whatever

²⁸ See Bömer (1969), 532: 'Kühne und offenbar singuläre Junktur'.

²⁹ See Barchiesi – Rosati (2007), 174, and Schrijvers (1985), 31, 43, in relation to Claudius Aelianus' text (see n. 30).

³⁰ The expression *Venus utraque* appears twice in Caelius Aurelianus' fifth century translation of the work of the Greek physician Soranos of Ephesus (1st/2nd century CE) *On Acute and On Chronic Diseases* (*Chronicarum passionum* 4.9.132 and 135). According to Brooten (1996), 151 and 157 n. 43, it denotes in both cases 'active and passive role', first in relation to women (4.9.132), then in relation to men (4.9.135), although the meaning 'love with both sexes' (endorsed by Schrijvers [1985], 31, 43) cannot be ruled out. The second instance of the expression appears in Claudius Aelianus' *De natura animalium* (2nd/3rd century CE) with reference to the change of sex of the hyena every year. Since the passage playfully refers explicitly to Caeneus and Tiresias, it is highly possible that Aelian has the Ovidian text in mind. In any case, the link between the expression 'both Venuses' and the active/passive role is clear: κοινωνοῦσί τε ἀφροδίτης ἑκατέρας, καὶ γαμοῦσί τε καὶ γαμοῦνται, ἀνὰ ἔτος πᾶν ἀμείβουσαι τὸ γένος ('they have a share of both Venuses, and in mating they are both active and passive, changing their sex/gender each year', Ael. NA 1.25). For the idea that Aelian probably knew Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, see Smith (2014), 139.

their biological sex. This is relevant to the point that Tiresias is after all just another male voice that confirms the supremacy of both male sex and male gender: as has already been noted by Liveley,³¹ Tiresias, like all the other characters who undergo transformation in the *Metamorphoses*, remains *himself* in a female body, and although we know that he played a passive role in sex during those seven years in which *he* was a woman, he never really departs from the performative acts of his original gender, and can be seen to continue playing an active role in the second encounter with the serpents³² as well as to continue embodying a privileged male point of view in his exchange with Jupiter and Juno.

Ovid's Tiresias is therefore a mortal male *uates*³³ whose knowledge of sex from both sides makes him a suitable judge to pronounce *sententiae* about the asymmetry of pleasure in sex between men and women. From this point of view specifically, Tiresias shares important traits with the poet of the *Amores*, who claims *me legat in sponsi facie non frigida uirgo / et rudis ignoto tactus amore puer* ('let me be read by a girl who is not cool in the presence of her promised lover, and by an inexperienced boy, touched by unknown love', *Am.* 2.1.2), and especially with the *praeceptor* of the *Ars Amatoria*, whose status of love poet already implies in a certain sense a mixture of virility and effeminacy³⁴ and who is thus able to give important advice on love and sex to *both* men *and* women – although the asymmetry between the two parties is implied by the very structure of the three books of the *Ars* (two books addressed to men, one to women), an asymmetry in no way rectified

³¹ Liveley (2003).

³² According to Liveley (2003), 160, the image of Tiresias striking the snakes with the staff is 'loaded with phallic significance', all the more so in view of the sexual connotation of *uiolauerat* at 325.

³³ On Tiresias as *uates*, see below.

³⁴ See Sharrock (2002), 98; Fabre-Serris (2011), 101, stresses Ovid's interest in relating both female and male perspectives, while Rimell (2006), 208 n. 4, connects it explicitly, though in passing, to Tiresias.

by the addition of the *Remedia*.³⁵ In the end, for both Tiresias and Ovid, this ability to speak on behalf of both sexes will retrospectively prove to be a downright inauspicious gift: *carmina fecerunt ut me cognoscere uellet / omine non fausto femina uirque meo* ('it was my poems that made women and men want to know me, but it was no good omen for me', *Tr.* 2.5-6).³⁶

It is precisely in Tiresias' verdict that the similarities with the *praeceptor* come to the fore. Ovid starts Tiresias' episode with intertextual reminiscences of Lucretius that set the stage for an anti-Lucretian polemic. Indeed, Jupiter's and Juno's separation from human matters is emphasised in this passage by the strikingly Lucretian compound *seposuisse* (319), which joins the *se-* compounds used by Lucretius when describing the ἀταραξία of the gods in the *intermundia* and their total indifference to human affairs:³⁷

omnis enim per se diuum natura necessest
immortali aeuo summa cum pace fruatur
semota ab nostris rebus **seiuncta**que longe.
nam priuata dolore omni, priuata periclis,
ipsa suis pollens opibus, nil indiga nostri,
nec bene promeritis capitur **neque tangitur ira**.

(Lucr. 1.44-9 = 2.646-51)³⁸

For any divine nature must necessarily enjoy immortal life in the deepest peace, *far removed* and *separated* from our affairs; for without any pain, without danger, itself mighty by its own resources, needing us not at all, it is neither propitiated with services *nor touched by anger*.

(tr. Rouse with minor changes)

³⁵ On the view that *Ars* and *Remedia* were conceived as a four-book poem mirroring the *Georgics*, see Green (2006), 3, with bibliography. On the complicated relationship between the books, see Rimell (2006), 70-103; Martelli (2013), 69-78, highlights the subordinate role of *Ars* 3 and *Remedia* in offering a commentary on, rather than an extension of, of the narrative of *Ars* 1-2.

³⁶ Cf. Ovid's advice to Perilla: *tantummodo femina nulla / neue uir a scriptis discat amare tuis* ('just try not to let any woman nor man learn how to love from your writings', *Tr.* 3.7.29-30).

³⁷ The intertext is noted by Barchiesi in Barchiesi – Rosati (2007), 174.

³⁸ The lines in Book 1 have long been considered an interpolation and have been expunged by many editors: see Bailey (1947), 601-3.

In Tiresias' episode, Jupiter and Juno are introduced to us as if they were two Lucretian divine natures far removed from human troubles. Yet the ending of Tiresias' story, in line with the message of the whole *Metamorphoses*,³⁹ inevitably subverts this model by showing that these gods are not at all unperturbed by human matters, and least of all are they 'untouched by anger'.⁴⁰

This Lucretian intertext anticipates Tiresias' specifically anti-Lucretian view on sexual pleasure,⁴¹ which matches the same anti-Lucretian stances expressed by the *praeceptor* in the *Ars Amatoria*. In the finale of *DRN* 4 (4.1030-1287), Lucretius famously expresses his views on sex and (the dangers of) love in what seems like an explicit anti-neoteric stance.⁴² In his so-called 'attack on love', Lucretius also espouses the anti-Tiresian theory that sexual pleasure is mutual and symmetrical, and he takes care to emphasise his view by constant repetition of the adjectives *mutuus* and *communis* as applied to the sexual act (see *communia... gaudia*, 4.1195-6; *mutua... uoluptas*, 1201; *mutua gaudia*, 1205; *communi' uoluptas*, 1207; *mutuus ardor*, 1216; cf. *mutua... gaudia*, 5.854; *mutua... cupido*, 5.963).⁴³ It is true that by stressing the existence of a mutual physical pleasure Lucretius aims at undermining by contrast the romantic idea of mutual love,⁴⁴ but the fact that he holds an opposing opinion to that found in both *Metamorphoses* and *Ars Amatoria* is telling in view of Ovid's conscious shaping of his didactic work, the *Ars*, as a decidedly anti-

³⁹ On the anti-Lucretian theological approach of the *Metamorphoses*, see Schiesaro (2002), 63-5.

⁴⁰ Cf. Jupiter's wrath in the Lycaon episode, the first instance of the 'flawed "theodicy"' of the *Metamorphoses*, with Anderson (1989).

⁴¹ On Tiresias as an anti-Lucretian *uates* in the subsequent episode of Narcissus, see Hardie (1988), 86-8.

⁴² See Brown (1987), 139-43.

⁴³ This clearly does not make Lucretius an advocate of sexual equality; rather his concern lies in the necessity of a mutual sexual fulfilment for the purposes of a successful conception: see Snyder (1976).

⁴⁴ Brown (1987), 311.

Lucretian construction.⁴⁵ In fact, if Lucretius says, in *DRN* 5, that it is actually the man who holds an ‘immoderate’ libido, *uiolenta uiri uis atque impensa libido* (‘man’s violent force and immoderate libido’, *Lucr.* 5.964), the *praeceptor* will instead stress more than once how women’s libido is more ‘furious’ and certainly ‘harsher’ than men’s:⁴⁶

parcior in nobis nec tam furiosa libido
legitimum finem flamma uirilis habet.

(*Ars* 1.281-2)

In us desire is weaker and not so frantic: the manly flame knows a lawful bound.

(tr. Mozley – Goold)

omnia feminea sunt ista libidine mota;
acrior est nostra plusque furoris habet.

(*Ars* 1.341-2)

All those crimes were prompted by women’s lust; which is harsher than ours, and has more madness.

(tr. Mozley – Goold with minor changes)

⁴⁵ See Sommariva (1980) and Shulman (1981).

⁴⁶ Ovid seems to endorse Lucretius’ theory of mutual pleasure in *Amores* 2.3: *mutua nec Veneris gaudia nosse potes* (‘and you cannot know the mutual pleasures of Venus’, *Am.* 2.3.2) However, Ovid’s attitude towards Lucretius has been seen by Shulman (1981) to become more antagonistic from the *Amores* into the *Ars* and the *Remedia*. The sexual pleasure presented in the famous climax of *Ars* 2 (*ad metam properate simul: tum plena uoluptas, / cum pariter uicti femina uirque iacent*, ‘hurry to the goal at the same time: then you’ll find full pleasure, when woman and man lie together, equally beaten’, *Ars* 2.727-8) is in my view only apparently mutual: at *Ars* 2.719-24, the *praeceptor* lingers only on the woman’s pleasure, provided to her by the man through masturbation (see Rimell [2006], 91); see James (2003), 205: ‘in fact it is no more than a restatement of the *praeceptor*’s typical desire to be in control, to know what his *puella* is feeling, to keep her dependent upon him.’ In James’ reading (2003), 207, the passage fits Tiresias’ verdict perfectly, showing that ‘female sexual pleasure... is a sign of male sexual prowess’.

In sharing these explicitly chauvinist views, both the *praeceptor* and Tiresias align themselves with Jupiter and provide a learned excuse for the brutality of rape – the rape that women tacitly desire, as famously argued in the final section of *Ars* 1 (1.663-80).⁴⁷ Ted Hughes’ Juno, when still waiting for and wrongly confiding in Tiresias’ response, makes this point rather explicit when addressing Jupiter thus:

‘He’ll explain’, cried Juno, ‘why you are
Slave to your irresistible addiction
While the poor nymphs you force to share it with you
Do all they can to shun it.’

(Hughes (1997) 73)

In Hughes’ rendition, Tiresias is actually given the chance to redeem the chauvinist stances of the *praeceptor*. And yet, he does nothing but reinforce them.

We have thus seen how Tiresias’ verdict explicitly reflects the views on women’s furious libido and on their tacit desire for rape that had been expressed by the *praeceptor* of the *Ars*. However, it is hard to deny that such views are also put under scrutiny or perhaps even undermined by the psychological insights into the plight of rape victims displayed throughout the *Metamorphoses*, in which, very differently from the *Ars*, the only indirect statement about women’s implicit consent to rape is precisely Tiresias’ verdict – a statement which unavoidably runs into its deserved

⁴⁷ This section, read together with the rape of the Sabine women (*Ars* 1.101-34) has been the subject of neverending debates: Myerowitz (1985) and (2006) thinks that it is clear that the *praeceptor* deplores the brutality of rape expressed in these episodes, while Hemker (1985) recovers Ovid’s voice as distancing itself from that of the *praeceptor*, but see *contra* Richlin (1992). Sharrock (2006) speaks of ‘the romanticization of force’ as a theme shared by all the digressions of *Ars* 1.

punishment.⁴⁸ This observation may seem at first sight to invalidate the analogy between Tiresias and Ovid proposed so far, but on closer inspection it should become clear that it serves instead to back it up. In fact, just like Ovid, Tiresias is a character who undergoes different phases, which coincide with one or more changes of literary genre. Thus, the punishment he receives after the playful elegiac episode that we have just witnessed will turn him into the real anti-Apollonian and anti-Lucretian⁴⁹ *uates* of the *Metamorphoses*: the one who will be in charge of introducing Ovid's masterpiece within Book 3, the pastoral/elegiac/tragic episode of Narcissus, and who will finally play his properly dramatic role in the tragedy of Pentheus at the end of the book. The punishment that Tiresias receives for his verdict on women in what has been explicitly labelled as no more than a 'playful dispute'⁵⁰ (*lite iocosa*, 332) is an analogous watershed to that which marks Ovid's different scopes and approaches between the elegiac corpus and the *Metamorphoses*. Only after recognising the limits and flaws of their elegiac attitudes can both Tiresias and Ovid finally become the *uates* of an epic poem in which sexual matters deserve an undoubtedly more insightful treatment than that offered by the problematically chauvinistic stance of the *Ars*.

3. Genre Conversions: Tiresias/Ovid as *uates*

It is telling, as we shall see when examining the passage from a post-exilic perspective, that it is only after the punishment has occurred that Tiresias can become a real, truth-telling *uates*. And yet, even if one is not ready to accept the connections between Tiresias and the *praeceptor* of the *Ars*, or

⁴⁸ See Curran (1978), 230, on how the 'facile cynicism' of the *Ars* 'gives way to a new empathy with women and their real wishes' in the *Metamorphoses*. But see *contra* Richlin (1992) on the continuing objectification of women in both texts.

⁴⁹ See Hardie (1988), 86-8.

⁵⁰ On *iocus* as an intertextual tag for the elegiac discourse of the *Ars*, see Pavlock (2009), 22, and below for its use in the exile poetry.

to imagine that this episode was revised after the exile, the fact that Tiresias is presented as the first non-divine *uates* of the *Metamorphoses* may already suggest that we should interpret this character as a double for the poet. In which case we should notice that Tiresias' first prophecy as *uates* appears to stand in direct opposition to the authority of the first, divine, *uates* of the poem, namely Apollo, the prophet of *Metamorphoses* 1.⁵¹ Indeed, it has long been noticed that Tiresias' prophecy about Narcissus⁵² is a patent contradiction of the Delphic maxim, γνῶθι σεαυτόν, to which the *praeceptor* himself had yielded in the second book of the *Ars*. As I will show, the obvious similarities between these two passages trigger a further chain of reflections on the metapoetic status of Ovid's Tiresias and on the generic transformations (this time it's genre rather than gender) in which both Tiresias and Ovid are involved:

ille per Ausonias **fama celeberrimus urbes**
 inreprehensa dabat populo responsa petenti;
 prima fide uocisque ratae temptamina sumpsit
 caerula Liriope, quam quondam flumine curuo
 implicuit clausaeque suis Cephisos in undis
 uim tulit: enixa est utero pulcherrima pleno
 infantem nymphe, iam tunc qui posset amari,
 Narcissumque uocat. de quo consultus, an esset
 tempora maturae uisurus longa senectae,
fatidicus uates 'si se non nouerit' inquit.

(*Met.* 3.339-348)

He, *most renowned by fame throughout the Boeotian towns*, gave answers that none could censure to those who sought his help. The first to make trial of his truth and assured utterances was the nymph Liriope, whom once the river-god, Cephisus, embraced in his winding stream and ravished, while imprisoned in his waters. When her time came the beautiful nymph brought forth a child, who could be loved even as a child, and called him Narcissus. When asked whether this child would live to reach well-ripened age, *the prophetic bard replied: 'if he never know himself.'*

(tr. Miller – Goold with minor changes)

haec ego cum canerem, subito manifestus Apollo
 mouit inauratae pollice fila lyrae.

⁵¹ On a superimposition/competition between Tiresias and Apollo in the origins of the myth, see García Gual (1975), 119, 121.

⁵² Incidentally, the first human lover of the poem.

in manibus laurus, sacris inducta capillis
 laurus erat; **uates** ille uidendus adit.
 is mihi «Lasciui» dixit «praeceptor Amoris,
 duc, age, discipulos ad mea templa tuos,
 est ubi **diuersum fama celebrata per orbem**
littera, cognosci quae sibi quemque iubet.
 qui sibi notus erit, solus sapienter amabit,
 atque opus ad uires exiget omne suas.

(Ars 2.493-502)

As I was singing thus, Apollo suddenly appeared and struck with his thumb the strings of his golden lyre. In his hand was laurel, with laurel his sacred locks were adorned; he comes closer, *a seer* to behold. And he says to me: ‘Praeceptor of wanton love, come, lead your pupils to my shrine, *where there is a saying renowned in fame throughout the whole world, which bids each to be known by himself*. Only he who knows himself will love with wisdom, and will perform all his task according to his strength.’

(tr. based on Mozley – Goold)

As noted in passing by Gildenhard and Zissos, with a telling slippage between Ovid and Tiresias, ‘Ovid[/Tiresias] here rewrites his earlier poetry and dogma’⁵³ as it had been presented in *Ars* 2. The connection between the two passages is anticipated by the relationship between Tiresias and the *Ars* discussed earlier, marking a progression between the themes treated at the end of *Ars* 1 and the programmatic poetic statement inserted in *Ars* 2.⁵⁴ The opening phrase *fama celeberrimus urbes* (*Met.* 3.339) seems to echo *fama celebrata per orbem / littera* (*Ars* 2.499) and the use of the technical term *uates* (*Met.* 3.348, being the first instance of the word in the *Metamorphoses*) singles out Tiresias and Apollo not just as prophets, but more specifically as (Augustan) poets.⁵⁵ In striking contrast to the *praeceptor*’s obedience to the γνῶθι σεαυτόν, this oracular poet, as famous as the Delphic oracle in the Boeotian towns, relates a truthful prophecy about Narcissus which is an explicit subversion of Apollo’s maxim.

⁵³ Gildenhard – Zissos (2000), 132 n. 14. See also Frings (2005), 164-7.

⁵⁴ The passage is in clear dialogue with Callim. *Aet.* fr. 1.21-24 Pf., Verg. *Ecl.* 6.3-5, Prop. 3.3.13-16, Hor. C. 4.15.1-4: see Janka (1997), 363-5, and Sharrock (1994), 197-290.

⁵⁵ See Sharrock (1994), 239, on Apollo as *uates*.

Before addressing the question of what this subversion of Apollo's dictum may imply for a post-*Ars Amatoria* Ovid, it is worth remembering that Tiresias is, or becomes, a prophet in all our extant sources, and as such he is already in direct competition with Apollo. The beginning of the so-called Sostratus version of the myth⁵⁶ tells us directly of Apollo's involvement in Tiresias' punishment, and Tiresias is here presented as a second Cassandra or a second Daphne,⁵⁷ punished for rejecting further sexual intercourse with Apollo in exchange for the god's teaching of music or, as O'Hara more plausibly suggests, 'prophecy':⁵⁸

Σώστρατος δὲ ἐν Τειρεσίᾳ, ποίημα δέ ἐστιν ἐλεγιακόν, φησὶ τὸν Τειρεσίαν θήλειαν τὴν ἀρχὴν γεννηθῆναι καὶ ἐκτραφῆναι ὑπὸ Χαρικλοῦς, καὶ ἑπτὰ ἐτῶν γενομένην ὀρειφοιτεῖν. ἐρασθῆναι δὲ αὐτῆς τὸν Ἀπόλλωνα. καὶ ἐπὶ μισθῷ συνουσίας διδάξαι τὴν μουσικὴν (O'Hara: *fortasse μαντικὴν*). τὴν δὲ μετὰ τὸ μαθεῖν μηκέτι ἑαυτὴν ἐπιδιδόναι τῷ Ἀπόλλωνι κάκεῖνον ἀνδρῶσαι αὐτὴν, ἵνα πειρῶτο Ἔρωτος.
(Eust. *ad Od.* 10.494, 1665.48ff. Stallbaum)

Sostratus in the *Tiresias*, an elegiac poem, says that Tiresias was originally born female, and was raised by Chariclo. At the age of seven she was wandering in the mountains, and Apollo fell in love with her, and taught her *music* (O'Hara: perhaps *prophecy*) as payment for sexual intercourse. But after being taught the girl no longer gave herself to Apollo, and he changed her into a man, so that she would have experience of Eros.

(tr. O'Hara)

Tiresias' connection to Apollo in this version of the myth may speak to the fact that Ovid presents the bard here as in direct opposition to the god that we have seen chasing Daphne in the first book of the *Metamorphoses*, as if the truth of the anti-Apollonian prophecy of Narcissus were a revengeful payback to Apollo for this less known version of the myth.⁵⁹ Indeed, while Tiresias

⁵⁶ See n. 9.

⁵⁷ Interestingly, Daphne (and not Manto) is the name of Tiresias' prophetic daughter according to Diodorus (4.66), who also equates her with Apollo's Sibyl.

⁵⁸ See O'Hara (1996), 183-5.

⁵⁹ See especially Tarrant (2005), 87, on how Ovid makes 'rejected variants contribute by their absence to the formation of a new version.'

emerges from both the Narcissus and the Pentheus episodes as a more than reliable *uates*, Apollo in Book 1 is embarrassingly presented as a prophet ‘deceived by his own oracles’ (*suaque illum oracula fallunt*, *Met.* 1.491), utterly defeated by the more certain precision of the arrows struck by Cupid: *certa quidem nostra est, nostra tamen una sagitta / certior* (‘my arrow is precise, but there is one arrow that is more precise than mine’, *Met.* 1.519-20). Indeed, the god’s long list to Daphne of all his powers and attributes (1.512-24), even his choice of a victim who is, after all, appropriate to his strengths, only serves to demonstrate the further fallibility of his own maxim, as haughtily presented in *Ars* 2: knowing yourself may serve to ‘love wisely’ (*sapienter amabit*, *Ars* 2.501), but to love wisely, as Sharrock points out, ‘is not to love at all’.⁶⁰ In becoming prey to the same furious passion of love to which he had condemned Sostratus’ Tiresias, Apollo is presented in Book 1 as thoroughly conquered by Cupid. But since Cupid, as specified in *Ars* 1, yields to the *praeceptor* (*et mihi cedet Amor*, ‘Amor will yield to me’, *Ars* 1.21), it is unsurprising that Tiresias, as an *ex-praeceptor Amoris*, should emerge from this prophetic competition as the real winner – a victory that the Theban seer will soon share precisely with Apollo’s opposing deity, when Bacchus is recognised as the truthful god of Thebes and of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 3.⁶¹

An (anti-)Augustan reading of Tiresias/Ovid’s poetic and prophetic competition with Apollo as the patron deity of the emperor is at this point easy to come by, especially since the relevance of Palatine Apollo is explicitly stated in the *Metamorphoses* (*Met* 1.562-3).⁶² However, just as in

⁶⁰ Sharrock (1994), 249.

⁶¹ For Ovid’s use of Bacchus in the exile poetry as his patron deity in contrast to Augustan Apollo, see Tsaknaki (2014).

⁶² I follow Oliensis (2004) in reading Ovid’s emulation of and rivalry with Augustus as not only a stock theme of the exile poetry, but a also pervading concern of the *Metamorphoses*. See Miller (2009), 332-73, on (Augustan) Apollo in the *Metamorphoses* and his interactions with Jupiter, not without an invitation to caution in applying too strict ideological readings to Ovid’s pantheon. On Palatine Apollo in *Ars* 2 see also Sharrock (1994), 225.

Tiresias' previous episode, the message conveyed here is as poetic as it is political. To start with, Ovid's programmatic, yet not unambiguous,⁶³ allegiance to Apollo could arguably work in a poem like the *Ars*, which may at least assume a front of refined Callimacheanism, but the Apollonian spring may have to be rejected when dealing with epic and, especially, tragedy – the explicit genre of the closing Pentheus episode and the implicit one of Narcissus as a recognised substitute for Oedipus.⁶⁴ Furthermore, Apollo's injunction to 'know yourself' and 'perform your task according to your strengths' metapoetically implies a programmatic *recusatio* of higher literary genres that suits the *praeceptor* of *Ars* 2 in a way that it cannot suit the *uates* of the *Metamorphoses*. More specifically, from a post-exilic perspective, the obedience to this maxim also caused Ovid to remain, as it were, stuck in the *Ars*, precisely the *carmen* that would cause his exile. To press this line of interpretation still further, the γνῶθι σεαυτόν helped in developing that Narcissistic obsession with elegy, and particularly love elegy, that can be recognised as Ovid's autobiographical complex lying behind the myth presented by wiser, anti-Apollonian Tiresias.⁶⁵ The Narcissus myth not only warns poets about the dangers of self-referentiality and self-obsession but also presents someone who, just like the poet of the *Ars*, can never tell the Other from the Self, be that Other the literary *persona* of the *praeceptor* or the *carmina* themselves. Indeed, Narcissus' tragic recognition (*iste ego sum*, 'I am he', *Met.* 3.463) dramatically reprises the confessed identity between Ovid, the *Ars* and the *praeceptor* (*ego sum praeceptor Amoris*, 'I am the praeceptor of Love', *Ars* 1.17), while his interchangeability with Oedipus looks forward to the explicit comparison between Oedipus and the books of the *Ars*, 'these latter day parricides in elegiac feet',⁶⁶ professed at the

⁶³ See Sharrock (1994), 212, on Ovid usurping Apollo's authority.

⁶⁴ Already suggested by Loewenstein (1984), 33-56, and Hardie (1988), 86; see especially Gildenhard – Zissos (2000), Frings (2005), 164-5.

⁶⁵ Pavlock (2009), 14-37. On connections between the Narcissus episode and the *Ars Amatoria* see also Frings (2005), 163-71.

⁶⁶ Hinds (1985), 18.

beginning of the *Tristia* (*Oedipodas*, *Tr.* 1.1.114).⁶⁷ From this point of view, Narcissus' and the *praeceptor*'s following of the Apollonian maxim stands in stark contrast with the anti-Delphic model of Tiresias: Ovid's obedience to Tiresias' new injunction 'never to know yourself' will bring about a conversion of both *persona* and literary genre that will take him through tragedy and epic, only to land him again – eventually – in a kind of elegy⁶⁸ that will be explicitly different from the genre of the *Ars*, namely the *carmina* of the exile: '*inspice*', *dic* '*titulum: non sum praeceptor Amoris*' ('say to him: "examine the title: *I am not the praeceptor of Love*', *Tr.* 1.1.67).

4. From Tiresias to Tristia

The idea that various sections of the *Metamorphoses* have been revisited – or even (re)written – after the exile is recurrent in Ovidian scholarship but is rarely spelt out. Apart from the now commonly recognised post-exilic status of *sphragis* and proem,⁶⁹ scholarly caution tends to focus either on how exilic poetry activates the post-exilic meanings of the *Metamorphoses* by a revision of the poem's episodes within the exile elegies themselves,⁷⁰ or on how the *Metamorphoses*' historical hindsight into the biography of the poet can deepen our understanding of the precarious career of late Augustan authors.⁷¹ Unlike the generally accepted revised status of *Fasti* and *Heroides*, the *Metamorphoses* are somehow considered more slippery ground, and a thorough

⁶⁷ On the notion that Ovid may implicitly portray himself as a latter-day Oedipus in the *Tristia*, see Ingleheart (2006), 69. On the similarities between Tiresias and Oedipus, see García Gual (1975), 129.

⁶⁸ Cf. Boyle's definition of the *Fasti* as 'an epic kind of elegy, and an elegiac kind of epic...', Boyle (1997), 20.

⁶⁹ From Kovacs (1987) onwards.

⁷⁰ From Hinds (1985) onwards; cf. Barchiesi (2001), 26-7.

⁷¹ Johnson's approach (2008), 121-22, although she does not rule out the possibility of an actual revision of the episodes of artistic competition in the *Metamorphoses*. Oliensis (2004) provides a useful blend of the two approaches.

analysis of their author's variants and of their possible exilic revisions is, to this day, still lacking.⁷² One of the *Metamorphoses* passages often suspected of post-exilic revision is, as we shall soon see, the pendant myth of Actaeon which immediately precedes the episode of Tiresias, and which is explicitly singled out by the poet himself in *Tristia* 2.103-8 as the mythical allegory of the *error* that caused his exile. In contrast to this exilic emphasis on Actaeon, the character of Tiresias is never mentioned in the poems from exile, and yet it was the Callimachean version of Tiresias' myth that inspired Ovid's episode of Actaeon in the first place.⁷³ Moreover, the episode of Tiresias appears so dense in exilic language that one is almost naturally encouraged to consider Tiresias and Actaeon in conjunction as forming the perfect mythical allegory of the *carmen* and *error* that caused Ovid's exile.

Before discussing the impact of Actaeon on Tiresias, let us first turn back to *Met.* 3.316-38 and establish the exilic flavour of the passage. This staging of a mythical trial makes abundant use of technical legal terminology which Ovid knew from his legal training,⁷⁴ and the lines have been analysed for their use of judicial language first by Kathleen Coleman and more recently by Kathryn Balsley.⁷⁵ To sum up Coleman's arguments first, the legal setting begins to emerge in lines 322-3, *placuit quae sit sententia docti / quaerere Tiresiae* ('they decided to ask the judgement of wise Tiresias', *Met.* 3.322-3), with the application to Tiresias of the epithet *doctus*, 'the *uox propria* of

⁷² For Ovid's revision of the *Fasti* see especially Fantham (1985) and Herbert-Brown (1994), 173-212; see Boyle (1997) for a post-exilic reading of the *Fasti*. Treatment of the *Metamorphoses* is programmatically not included in Martelli (2013).

⁷³ See n. 9.

⁷⁴ See Kenney (1969); Ovid was trained in the schools of Arellius Fuscus and Porcius Latro (*Sen. Controv.* 2.2.8-12), he served among the *tresuiri capitales* (*Tr.* 4.10.33-4), the *decemuiri stlitibus iudicandis* (*Fasti* 4.383-4), and he was a centumuir and *iudex* (*Tr.* 2.93-6).

⁷⁵ Coleman (1990) and Balsley (2010).

the learned and experience juriconsult',⁷⁶ the technical use of *sententia* to indicate the jury's verdict⁷⁷ and the use of *placuit* to underline an authoritative decree.⁷⁸ After the brief digression on Tiresias' sex changes, the trial continues with even more technical language: *arbiter hic sumptus de lite iocosa / dicta Iouis firmat* ('He, being appointed to arbitrate this playful dispute, confirms Jupiter's sentence', *Met.* 3.332-3), where *arbitrum... sumere* is 'a standard phrase... for the appointment of an adjudicator',⁷⁹ *firmare* can be compared to *adfirmare* as indicating technical corroboration and *lis* is the technical term for a controversy.⁸⁰ When the verdict has been delivered, Tiresias undergoes a further metamorphosis from *arbiter* into *iudex* (*iudicis*, 335) which seems to underline Ovid's precise use of technical terminology in the passage, since while the *arbiter* 'assessed the validity of competing claims', the *iudex* 'decided which party in a dispute was right'.⁸¹ After Tiresias has been condemned (*damnauit*, 335), this time with no trial, two further technical phrases seal the legal tone of the passage: while *inritum facere* (336-7) is 'a set phrase for reducing penalties',⁸² *poenam leuare* (338) is 'the technical phrase for an act of annulment'.⁸³

On the basis of Coleman's contribution, Balsley argues that such a shift in the passage towards legal terminology 'represents a move in this scene from a playful mock trial [332 *lite iocosa*] to a very real judgement and permanent punishment',⁸⁴ and the episode takes us 'from a performance of

⁷⁶ Coleman (1990), 573; Balsley (2010), 15.

⁷⁷ Coleman (1990), 573; Balsley (2010), 15.

⁷⁸ Balsley (2010), 15 n. 9.

⁷⁹ Coleman (1990), 574.

⁸⁰ Coleman (1990), 574.

⁸¹ Coleman (1990), 575; Balsley (2010), 16, 20-23.

⁸² Coleman (1990), 575; Balsley (2010), 17.

⁸³ Coleman (1990), 574; Balsley (2010), 17.

⁸⁴ Balsley (2010), 15.

injustice to a practice of injustice'.⁸⁵ The scene, she posits, must be read in the context of Augustus' intervention in judicial matters, when he attempted to control the jurists through the introduction of the very mysterious *ius respondendi*, which possibly gave Augustus' appointed jurists the right to render *responsa* that were legally binding for judges.⁸⁶ Finally, Balsley draws attention to the double meaning of the word *arbiter* (both judge and witness) and to the peculiarity of the fact that blinding is both the punishment reserved for those who have wrongly witnessed something forbidden, and what will make it impossible for this *arbiter*/judge to be an *arbiter*/witness ever again. This paradox, she argues, can be seen to allude to the reality of Augustus' autocratic control over legal matters, in so far as the episode 'reverses the standard Roman procedure for the morality laws, punishing witnesses before they can punish those who have been witnessed'.⁸⁷

And yet there is a final shift that Balsley never ventures to make, perhaps because it would necessarily imply an interpretation of the whole passage as a post-exilic revision: I refer, of course, to the evident similarity between Tiresias' and Ovid's cases, which is further underlined by specific echoes between *Met.* 3.316-38 and Ovid's plea to Augustus in *Tristia* 2. Indeed, Ovid himself, as he claims explicitly in *Tristia* 2, acted in the past – like Tiresias – as 'a judge with no crime' (*sine crimine iudex*, *Tr.* 2.94), and he takes care to emphasise how his conduct as a judge had been blameless and unworthy of the punishment he received (*Tr.* 2.93-6). One of the main points of the passage is to contrast his strict obedience to the customary legal procedures of Roman trials with the unexpected absence of those same procedures when it was instead his turn to be punished with *relegatio* (*Tr.* 2.131-4). If we accept Balsley's reading of the punishment of Tiresias as a covert allusion to Augustus' subversion of the legal Roman system, it is hard not to recall that Ovid himself had been a victim of this very subversion: like Tiresias, Ovid was not condemned by a senatorial decree (*nec mea decreto damnasti facta senatus*, *Tr.* 2.131), nor was his *relegatio* decided

⁸⁵ Balsley (2010), 17.

⁸⁶ Balsley (2010), 21.

⁸⁷ Balsley (2010), 27.

by an appointed judge (*nec mea selecto iudice iussa fuga est*, *Tr.* 2.132), but the verdict was rather dictated by the revengeful anger of a (semi-divine) monarch: *tristibus inuectus uerbis – ut principe dignum*⁸⁸ – / *ultus es offensas, ut decet, ipse tuas* ('with words of stern invective – worthy of a prince – you avenged your injuries, as is fitting', *Tr.* 2.133-4). As Ingleheart puts it, 'Ovid's role as one member of a long-standing judicial body may be implicitly contrasted with Augustus, the sole judge with extra-ordinary powers'.⁸⁹ In *Tristia* 1.1, we read that the punishment came, like that of Tiresias', from the height of the Lucretian seats of *numina* which are *mitissima*, but only as long as one does not interfere with their will: *esse quidem memini mitissima sedibus illis / numina, sed timeo qui nocuere deos* ('there are, I remember, in those shrines deities of exceeding mercy, but I fear the gods who have wrought me harm', *Tr.* 1.1.73-4).⁹⁰

Furthermore, the previously discussed similarities between Tiresias' verdict and the opinions expressed by the *praeceptor* of the *Ars* can now be coupled with the recognition that Ovid's crime in writing the *Ars* was also, like Tiresias', a crime of 'talent' and 'judgement': *paenitet ingenii iudiciiue mei* ('I repent of my *talent* and my *judgement*', *Tr.* 2.316). This crime was prevalently caused by his 'knowledge': cf. *arguor obsceni doctor adulterii* ('I am accused of having *taught* obscene adultery', *Tr.* 2.212), *ei mihi, quod didici!*⁹¹ *cur me docuere parentes?* ('Alas that I have *acquired learning*! Why did my parents *teach* me?', *Tr.* 2.343) and *docti... Tiresiae; Venus huic erat utraque nota* ('wise Tiresias: he *knew* both sides of love', *Met.* 3.322-3).⁹² Like Tiresias, Ovid was

⁸⁸ Burmann's conjecture for *ita principe dignum*, accepted by Ingleheart (2010), 150.

⁸⁹ Ingleheart (2010), 117; see also Thibault (1964), 5-11.

⁹⁰ On Ovid's emphasis on *ira* in the *Tristia*, see Syme (1978), 223-5; on other Lucretian echoes in *Tristia* 1.1, see Hinds (1999), 55.

⁹¹ Ingleheart (2010), 282, accepts Kenney's conjecture *quo didici*.

⁹² Cf. the futility of teaching love matters in Cephalus's words: *et sensi et docui. sed quid docuisse iuuabat?* ('I realised that, and I told [/taught] her. But what availed the telling [/teaching]?', *Met.* 7.858) with Rosiello (2002), 442.

parum prudens ('too little cautious, *Tr.* 2.544 and *Pont.* 2.10.15), perhaps with a hint that he was also a 'too little cautious judge' (*OLD prudens*²), especially in relating the secrets of the *praeceptor*: *ergo quae iuueni mihi non nocitura putaui / scripta parum prudens, nunc nocuere seni* ('thus the writings that as a young man, too little cautious, I supposed would harm me not, have harmed me now that I am old', *Tr.* 2.543-4). For this reason, both Ovid and Tiresias 'received the harsh reward of [their] teaching': *Naso parum prudens, artem dum tradit amandi, / doctrinae pretium triste magister habet* ('Naso was too little cautious when he imparted the art of love, and the teacher received the harsh reward of his teaching', *Pont.* 2.10.15-6).

Yet the most interesting similarity between the two events is to be found in the observation that Juno 'grieves more deeply than it was just', and 'more than the issue warranted' (*gravius Saturnia iusto / nec pro materia fertur doluisse*, *Met.* 3.333-4). In commenting on these lines, Balsley notes that the term *materia* ('issue', 'matter') continues to fit the legal terminology of the passage, since the term is used to describe the topic of *controuersiae*: by specifying that Tiresias had been an *arbiter* in a *controuersia*, she argues, Ovid singles out the inappropriateness of Juno's irascible behaviour.⁹³ I would add that the term *materia* also fits perfectly the topic of a *carmen*. Still in *Tristia* 2 Ovid claims explicitly that the punishment should have been equal to the *materia* of the *Ars* (*materiae minor est debita poena meae*, 'my subject matter deserves a lesser penalty', *Tr.* 2.516), since what he wrote, although certainly not deserving of praise, were still mere *ioci*,⁹⁴ just like the *iocosa lis* ('playful dispute', *Met.* 3.332) that Tiresias naïvely thinks he has been called to arbitrate. Ovid further reinforces this point when, in the last lines of his plea to Augustus, he

⁹³ Balsley (2010), 24.

⁹⁴ Cf. *scis uetus hoc iuueni lusum mihi carmen, et istos / ut non laudandos, sic tamen esse iocos* ('you know that this poem was written long ago, an amusement of my youth, and that those *jests*, though not deserving of praise, were still mere *jests*', *Tr.* 1.9.61-2); *uita uerecunda est, Musa iocosa mea* ('my life is moral, my Muse is playful', *Tr.* 2.354); *magis uita Musa iocata mea est* ('my Muse was merrier than my life', *Tr.* 3.2.6).

stresses again that the exile at Tomis is too harsh a punishment for his wrongdoings, and asks for a more peaceful place, which may match his crime more fairly: *tutius exilium pauloque quietius oro, / ut par delicto sit mea poena suo* ('I only beg a safer, a slightly more peaceful place of exile, so that the punishment may match my crime', *Tr.* 2.577-8).

This last point finally brings into play the connection between Tiresias and the myth of Actaeon, as presented in both *Metamorphoses* 3 and *Tristia* 2. The similarities drawn by Ovid between Actaeon and his own fate include the fact that the crime was a 'mistake' (*error*, *Tr.* 2.109 and *Met.* 3.142) caused by mere ill-fortune rather than evil intent (*fortuna luenda est*, 'ill-fortune must be atoned for', *Tr.* 2.107; *fortunae crimen*, 'a crime of ill-fortune', *Met.* 3.141), and that they were both guilty of having inadvertently *seen* (*imprudenti...mihi*, 'thoughtless me', *Tr.* 2.104; *inscius Actaeon*, 'unwitting Actaeon', *Tr.* 2.105) something that they should not have witnessed:⁹⁵

cur aliquid uidi? cur noxia lumina feci?
cur imprudenti cognita culpa mihi?
inscius Actaeon uidit sine ueste Dianam:
praeda fuit canibus non minus ille suis.
scilicet in superis etiam fortuna luenda est,
nec ueniam laeso numine casus habet.
illa nostra die, qua me malus abstulit error...

(*Tr.* 2.103-9)

Why did I see anything? Why did I make my eyes guilty? Why was I so thoughtless as to harbour the knowledge of a crime? Unwitting was Actaeon when he beheld Diana unclothed; none the less he became the prey of his own hounds. Clearly, among the gods, even ill-fortune

⁹⁵ This has caused much speculation among Ovid's 'conspiracy theorists', on/against which see Hinds (2007) and Ingleheart (2006) and (2010), 122, with reference to Thibault (1964), esp. 73-4. On Ovid altering the myth in order to emphasise Actaeon's innocence see Rosiello (2002), 446-52. Emily Gowers points out to me that, in contrast to Callimachus' 'sexy Athena' (on which see Hadjittofi (2008)), Ovid never lingers on a description of Diana, focussing on the surrounding landscape instead (*Met.* 3.155-64). Diana's blush (*Met.* 3.183-5), she suggests, may be seen to superimpose on the poet's 'descriptive inhibition'.

must be atoned for, nor is mischance an excuse when a deity is wronged. On that day when my ruinous error ravished me away...

(tr. Wheeler with minor changes)

at bene si quaeras, fortunae crimen in illo,
non scelus inuenies; quod enim scelus error habebat?

(*Met.* 3.141-2)

But if you seek the truth, you will find the cause of this in fortune's fault, not in any crime of his. For what crime had mere mischance?

(tr. Miller – Goold with minor changes)

Ovid's clues about the claim that the *error* consisted of having inadvertently witnessed something he should not also fits the punishment reserved for Tiresias, a recognition that must be coupled with the connections established between blinding and exile in the exile corpus,⁹⁶ in addition to Ovid's promise to shroud the *error* in utter darkness: cf. *illa tegi caeca condita nocte decet* ('...it should be covered by the blindness of the night', *Tr.* 3.6.32) and *iudicis aeterna damnauit lumina nocte* ('he condemned the arbitrator's eyes to perpetual darkness', *Met.* 3.335). Furthermore, another similarity between the fates of Ovid and Actaeon can be recognised, as in the case of Tiresias, in the discrepancy between the crime unwittingly committed and the harsh punishment inflicted – without trial – by an angered deity. However, the only explicit mention of this is found in the comments that follow the punishment of Actaeon in the *Metamorphoses*, which have been subtly compared by Ingleheart to Tacitus' report of the divided views on Augustus' principate after his death (*Ann.* 1.9-10).⁹⁷ Here, Ovid reports the divided opinion about the fairness of Actaeon's punishment, noting that some found that the goddess Diana behaved indeed 'more cruelly than was just':

rumor in ambiguo est; aliis **uiolentior aequo**
uisa dea est, alii laudant dignamque seuera
uirginitate uocant: pars inuenit utraque causas.

(*Met.* 3.253-5)

⁹⁶ See Ingleheart (2006), 68.

⁹⁷ Ingleheart (2006), 75.

Common talk wavered this way and that: to some the goddess seemed more cruel than was just; others called her act worthy of her austere virginity; both sides found good reasons for their judgement.

(tr. Miller – Goold)

Tristia 2 peremptorily invites us to reread the *Metamorphoses* in the light of Ovid's exile. Indeed, the whole of the exile poetry, by recreating the myths of the *Metamorphoses* and applying them to the poet himself, makes us complicit in the search for parallels between the life of the poet and those of his characters, a search that Ovid openly inaugurates in *Tristia* 1.1, when he claims that the metamorphosis of his fortune should be added to the *mutatae formae* of the poem (*Tr.* 1.1.117-122), and one that he further invites us to join in *Tristia* 1.7, with the statement that the *carmina* of the *Metamorphoses* are indeed a 'better image' of himself (*sed carmina maior imago / sunt mea, Tr.* 1.7.11-2).⁹⁸ Ovid's subtle game of insinuating a post-exilic re-reading of the *Metamorphoses* within the exile poetry is precisely what should make us cautious of entertaining the notion that he actually rewrote sections of the poem, if simply because the author is confessing that he is himself capable of finding prophetic hints about his future exile when re-reading those very same sections. Actaeon is a prime example of this conundrum. Readers of the exile poetry, and of the Actaeon parallel in *Tristia* 2, would immediately think of Ovid's fate when reading *Met.* 3.141-2, not least because of the explicit dichotomy between *scelus* and *error* that would become such a stock topic in the exile.⁹⁹ And yet this does not mean that we should rule out the possibility that, since the author of

⁹⁸ See especially Hinds (1985) and (1999). For a list of Ovid's mythological and tragic *exempla* in the exile poetry, see Broege (1972).

⁹⁹ See *error... ne scelus, Tr.* 1.3.38-9; *nullum scelus... principiumque mei criminis error habet, 3.6.25-6; magis errorem quam scelus, 3.11.34; error... non scelus, 4.1.23-4; culpam scelus esse negabis... prius obfuit error, 4.4.37-9; errorem... non scelus, 4.10.90; in culpa non scelus esse, 5.4.18; stulta... non nobis mens scelerata, 1.2.100; see Bömer (1969), 488-9, for the belief that the passage is a post-exilic revision; cf. Williams (1994), 175, for caution; see also Barchiesi – Hardie (2010), 70-78, on how Apuleius seems to read the Actaeon episode from a post-exilic perspective.*

Tristia 2 was himself, after all, a reader of the *Metamorphoses*, he may have noticed the dramatic irony inherent in his own phrasings of Actaeon and decided to apply it explicitly to his own situation in the plea to Augustus – a hypothesis which can be further corroborated by the observation that the term *error*, in the sense of ‘wanderings’, fits Actaeon in the *Metamorphoses* in a way that it can only fit partially the poet of the exile.¹⁰⁰

If this interpretation is valid for Actaeon, the situation may change slightly in the case of Tiresias. Notwithstanding the obvious parallels between the Theban *uates* and the poet, Ovid never makes the equation explicit in the way that he does with Actaeon. The version of Tiresias’ myth inserted by Callimachus as a frame for Actaeon in his fifth *Hymn On the Bath of Pallas* is a double for the myth of Actaeon that differs mostly in the eventual outcome of the punishment.¹⁰¹ Tiresias too inadvertently makes the mistake of seeing a goddess unclothed at the bath (Pallas), but rather than being torn apart by dogs, he is blinded and subsequently rewarded with prophecy, longevity and mental faculties in Hades (*Hymn* 5.121-30). Ovid’s choice of Callimachus as his source for the myth of Actaeon while going back to the pseudo-Hesiodic version of the myth of Tiresias clearly fulfills the two aims of *uariatio* and metamorphosis needed in his epic poem. Yet the choice also allows him – consciously or not we could never tell for sure – to stage what reads retrospectively as a double version of the cause of his exile, with Actaeon falling into the *error* of witnessing something he should not have, and Tiresias being guilty of uttering the *carmen* that told the different attitudes of men and women in the art of love. When Ovid invites us, in *Tristia* 2, to reread *Metamorphoses* 3, I suggest that he also invites us to consider the episode of Actaeon together with the subsequent episode of Tiresias, which remains instead unmentioned in the exilic corpus. This

¹⁰⁰ See Ingleheart (2006), 74 n. 3, on the parallel between Actaeon’s wanderings (*error*) and Ovid’s wanderings in exile; yet while the wanderings of Actaeon cause the punishment, Ovid’s wanderings *are* the punishment. On *error* as *uagatio* in Ovid, see Rosiello (2002), 426-32.

¹⁰¹ On the similarity between Actaeon’s and Tiresias’ violation into the mysteries of women’s sexual pleasure, see Fabre-Serris (2011), 107.

elision of Tiresias from the exilic elegies may be pointed: unlike with Actaeon, an explicit parallel with Tiresias in *Tristia* 2 would have arguably helped little in eliciting Augustus' sympathies towards Ovid's cause. Indeed, if the *error* of Actaeon was unintentional, and therefore not a *scelus*, Tiresias' verdict on women's sexual pleasure was, like the *Ars*, an intentional *carmen* – if arguably not a *crimen*.¹⁰² Secondly, while the main parallel between Actaeon and Ovid consisted in the unintentionality of the *error*, the main parallel between the episode of Tiresias and Ovid's case focusses instead on the exaggerated cruelty, and illegal procedure, of the punishment received.¹⁰³ The possible allusions to Augustus' subversion of the Roman legal procedures, coupled with Tiresias/Ovid's payback in his following anti-Apollonian/anti-Augustan verdict, make the episode unsuitable, to say the least, to serve as Ovid's counterpart in his plea to Augustus. Unlike in the case of Actaeon, such an interpretation of the episode of Tiresias would be difficult to sustain without the assumption that the passage was at least revisited after Ovid had been sentenced to exile; however, Ovid's subtle game of rewriting the *Metamorphoses* in exile made it so that Tiresias, if post-exilic, was meant from the start, just like Actaeon, to be interpreted in line with either a pre-exilic or post-exilic reading.

5. To conclude, not without a hint of conspiracy

Since we have so far played along with one of Ovid's intended games in the exile poetry – to insinuate a post-exilic reading of the *Metamorphoses* within the exile elegies themselves – it seems apt to take up another favourite game of the *Tristia* and at least drop a hint of some reasoned

¹⁰² The *carmen-crimen* pun is a favourite of the exile poetry, see Claassen (2008), 122-3, 140.

¹⁰³ As Hinds (2007), 211 notes, speaking about the sentence would itself already be an act of insubordination.

conspiracy theory.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, if we accept that this episode is an intended allegory of Ovid's punishment for writing the *Ars*, it would follow that the party offended by the *carmen*, and indeed the divine monarch who sentenced Tiresias/Ovid to blinding/exile was not so much Jupiter/Augustus, but rather his wife Juno/Livia, incidentally the same goddess who was also the only deity to rejoice at the punishment inflicted on Actaeon (*sola Iouis coniunx... gaudet*, *Met.* 3.256-9). This is all, clearly and exactly, unprovable speculation, but the suspicion that Livia had a not uninfluential role in Ovid's *relegatio* has often been suggested in the past – and I do not refer to the (in)famous suggestions that Ovid/Actaeon saw Livia naked in her bath¹⁰⁵ or at the Bona Dea rites,¹⁰⁶ or that the poet had an affair with the *femina princeps*,¹⁰⁷ but rather to the political analysis, inaugurated by Owen and more recently repropounded by Green, that Ovid's *error* was somehow concerned with Augustus' succession and his sympathies for the Julians and Germanicus rather than the Claudians and Tiberius.¹⁰⁸ The empress, explicitly equated by Ovid with Juno in *Ex Ponto* 3.1 (*mores Iunonis habendo / sola est caelesti digna reperta toro*, 'having the character of Juno, she has been found alone worthy to share the divine couch', *Tr.* 3.1.117-18),¹⁰⁹ in 'a poem chock full of

¹⁰⁴ On Ovid and the conspiracy theorists see Hinds (2007) and Ingleheart (2006), 66. On Ovid's urges to his model reader to 'read more' in the exile poetry see Casali (1997).

¹⁰⁵ A view championed by Deville (1859), 50-61, see Thibault (1964), 73-4.

¹⁰⁶ A suggestion by Herrmann (1938), 717, see Thibault (1964), 102-9.

¹⁰⁷ See Thibault (1964), 51-2; on the novelty of the *iunctura*, see Barchiesi (2006), 105.

¹⁰⁸ Owen (1924), 26-36, Green (1982), Luisi – Berrino (2002), 23-35, and Knox (2004), the latter also suggesting that the offence in the *Ars* lay in Ovid's panegyric for the young Gaius. See *contra* Thibault (1964), 75-86.

¹⁰⁹ Accentuated by the echo of Juno in *Fasti* 1: *sola toro magni digna reperta Iouis* ('she alone was found worthy of sharing the couch of great Jupiter', *Fasti* 1.650)

unsettling panegyric',¹¹⁰ is arguably the subject of tongue-in-cheek praise already in Ovid's plea to Augustus: *quae, nisi te, nullo coniuge digna fuit, / quae si non esset, caelebs te uita deceret, / nullaque, cui posses esse maritus, erat* ('she who was worthy of no other husband but you, and but for whose existence an unwedded life would befit you, since there was no other woman who you could be married to', *Tr.* 2.162-4).¹¹¹ Both passages set up an implicit contrast between the *mores* preached but not practised by the not-so-*uniuira* Livia and those lascivious customs that the *praeceptor* suggested adopting, among other places, precisely under the *porticus* that unexpectedly bore her name (*Ars* 1.72).¹¹² Livia is indeed the Ur-*matrona* who should not (have) read the poem (*nil igitur matrona legat*, *Tr.* 2.255) of which Augustus had apparently only heard selected passages recited aloud by evil enemies of Ovid (2.77-80).¹¹³ And the ideological problem of that poem was, as we have seen, Ovid/Tiresias' verdict on the unrestrained sexual desire of all women, including Livia/Juno, whose double marriage, as Barchiesi points out, was not at all elided behind the claims to monogamy and the exhibition of *priscae tabellae* in her *porticus* (*Ars* 1.71-2) as a move to counteract the erotic pictures and lascivious customs of the time.¹¹⁴

This interpretation of Juno is not necessarily in contradiction with the previously suggested interpretation of Juno as proto-feminist. It is the feminist perspective, in Ovid's discourse, that destabilises the more orthodox principles of the *Ars Amatoria* and of Tiresias' verdict, which as such align directly and incontrovertibly with Augustus and Jupiter. Thus the episode of Tiresias appears to match Ovid's continuous assurances to Augustus that the *Ars Amatoria* is after all in line

¹¹⁰ See Barchiesi (2006), 115 n. 37, and Johnson (1997), 415, especially convincing on Ovid's use of negative *exempla* of mythological women in the poem in an implicitly positive rather than negative comparison with Livia.

¹¹¹ See Barchiesi (1997), 32-4.

¹¹² See Barchiesi (2006), 101-7.

¹¹³ On Augustus' unfamiliarity with the *Ars*, see Williams (1994), 172, 179-89.

¹¹⁴ See Barchiesi (2006), 114-20.

with his cultural and political program, while Tiresias and Jupiter end up uniting in negative association against Juno. If we read Livia as Juno in the Tiresias episode, the subversive nature of feminist critique ends up superimposing itself on the subversive suggestion that it is a woman here, the *principessa*, who seems to hold the reins of political power. After the fall of the Republic and the establishment of an imperial dynasty, any treatment of gender – especially if it involves the divine monarchs – must necessarily become a politically charged issue.

In conclusion, the Tiresias episode can be read as a cluster of Ovid's poetic experiences and at the same time as a suggestive allegory of Ovid's own self-transformation into an exile poet. Such a reading cannot escape the assumption of a post-exilic revision of Tiresias in the *Metamorphoses*, not just with regard to the autobiographical interpretation of the passage, but also in terms of a poetic reading of Tiresias' punishment as an aetiology of Ovid's exilic innovations in the elegiac genre. This does not mean that my reading of Tiresias has demonstrated the existence of a post-exilic revision of the passage, which we will in all likelihood never be able to ascertain: it has proved rather that reading the *Metamorphoses* in accordance with Ovid's invitation, in exile, to insert his own story among the *mutatae formae* of a poem which he claims to have left unfinished (*Tr.* 1.1.117-122) does not necessarily need to be thought of as a less fruitful experiment after we accept the strictly literary – post-Virgilian – nature of the suggestion that the *Metamorphoses*, like the *Aeneid*, lacked the last hand of their poet. If we agree with Rosati's statement that Ovid's poetry 'asserts its right to submit to its own rules that reality from which it nourishes, and to turn that reality into literature',¹¹⁵ this also implies that the exile elegies may also have the opposite power of turning the previous literature into (autobiographical) reality. This suggestion applies to the

¹¹⁵ Rosati (1979), 106: 'La poesia non è docile testimone del reale, dell'esistente: essa rivendica a sé il diritto di sottoporre alle sue leggi anche la realtà di cui essa si nutre, di rendere quella realtà letteratura'. See Viarre (1991), 141, for a slightly different approach, according to which the 'mémoire mythologique' superimposes itself on the 'mémoire affective' to provide Ovid's condition with a 'dimension surréelle'.

Metamorphoses passim, with the promise of more insights yet to find, but in this essay it has prompted the realisation that the metamorphosis of Tiresias is not, or not just, the double sex-change of the pseudo-Hesiodic version, which allows Ovid to distance himself from Callimachus and to justify Tiresias' presence in the poem. The real metamorphosis is the metamorphosis of the author and his poetry, the one that we are enjoined to look for in the *Metamorphoses* from the beginning of the *Tristia*: Ovid's transformation from playful, self-obsessed elegiac *praeceptor* of the *Ars Amatoria* into blinded *uates* of both *Metamorphoses* and *Tristia*. This blind seer is no longer allowed to see and recognise himself as love elegist and *praeceptor Amoris*, he is no longer permitted to see Rome and witness its political, legal and poetic affairs; yet in his blindness, like the Tiresias of T. S. Eliot, he 'sees the substance of the poem[s]'¹¹⁶ and their late Augustan changes. In the light of his Tiresias, Ovid's exile poetry proves to be not just the point of arrival in a metamorphic poetic career, but also the last and most extreme effort to make innovations in the elegiac genre within the theme of 'transformation'. Like the *Metamorphoses'* Tiresias, this new poetry is permeated with the memory of the whole of Ovid's previous career and its generic transformations up to the final conversion, which is also envisaged in the famous *sphragis* of the *Metamorphoses*: the projected fusion of the immortal author and his eternal *carmen*.

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¹¹⁶ T. S. Eliot, *Wasteland*, note to line 218.

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